

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6234

INFO USMISSION USBERLIN

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 17773

USBERLIN ALSO FOR AMBASSADOR HILLENBRAND

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, GW

SUBJECT: SPECULATION ABOUT A NEW GRAND COALITION

SUMMARY: PUBLIC COMMENTS BY CSU LEADER STRAUSS AND SPD
FRAKTION LEADER WEHNER ABOUT A POSSIBLE GRAND COALITION
IN THE CASE OF DIRE CRISIS HAS FED SPECULATION ABOUT A
RETURN TO A SPD/CDU COALITION. AT PRESENT THESE
COMMENTS APPEAR TO BE DESIGNED MORE AS A MEANS OF IN-
FLUENCING DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE PARTIES AND RELATIONS
BETWEEN THE PRESENT COALITION PARTNERS THAN AS A SERIOUS
PROPOSAL TO FORM A NEW COALITION. VOCAL OPPOSITION BY
SPD, FDP AND CDU LEADERS AS WELL AS RECENT CDU/CSU
VICTORIES MILITATE AGAINST A CDU-SPD COALITION. HOWEVER,
THAT WEHNER, THE ARCHITECT OF THE 1966 GRAND COALITION,
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VOICED THE POSSIBILITY ALBEIT UNDER EXCEPTIONAL

CIRCUMSTANCES AND THAT CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT HAS REMAINED SILENT HAVE KEPT SPECULATION ALIVE. END SUMMARY

1. THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION FOLLOWING PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY CSU LEADER FRANZ-JOSEPH STRAUSS AND SPD FRAKTION LEADER WEHNER THAT UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES (E.G., ECONOMIC CRISIS), A SPD/CDU GRAND COALITION WOULD BE POSSIBLE. WILLY BRANDT QUICKLY DISMISSED THE SPECULATION ("NONSENSE DESIGNED TO BRING STRAUSS TO POWER") AS DID FDP FRAKTION LEADER MISCHNICK. MAJOR CDU FIGURES SUCH AS KOHL AND BIEDENKOPF HAVE ALSO REJECTED THE IDEA AND FRAKTION LEADER CARSTENS TOLD THE CDU/CSU FRAKTION ON NOVEMBER 12 THAT HE WOULD REFUSE TO SERVE AS FRAKTION LEADER IN THE EVENT OF A GRAND COALITION. HOWEVER, WHILE POLITICIANS IN BONN DO NOT BELIEVE A GRAND COALITION IS LIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE FACT THAT HERBERT WEHNER, THE ARCHITECT OF THE 1966 GRAND COALITION, HAS FED THE SPECULATION AND CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT HAS SO FAR REMAINED SILENT KEEP THE ISSUE ALIVE.

2. THE SPECULATION ABOUT A SCHMIDT-STRAUSS COALITION BEGAN WHEN POLITICAL OBSERVERS NOTED THAT DURING THE BAVARIAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT (WHO PARTICIPATED VERY LITTLE IN THE CAMPAIGN) WAS NOT VERY AGGRESSIVE IN HIS COMMENTS ABOUT FRANZ-JOSEPH STRAUSS AND ON OCCASION EVEN SPOKE OF HIS RESPECT FOR THE CSU LEADER AS AN OPPONENT. STRAUSS FOR HIS PART AVOIDED DIRECT ATTACKS ON SCHMIDT AND FOLLOWING HIS VICTORY WAS CAUTIOUS WHEN ASKED BY "BILD ZEITUNG" IF A GRAND COALITION IN THE EVENT OF AN ECONOMIC CRISIS WERE COMPLETELY RULED OUT. STRAUSS REPLIED, "A RESPONSIBLE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL POLICY COULD BE MADE WITH A PART OF THE SPD . . ." LATER, WEHNER IN A RADIO INTERVIEW SAID THAT IN THE CASE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 17773

OF A DIRE SITUATION (E.G., WHEN AN ECONOMIC CRISIS REQUIRED AN EMERGENCY PROGRAM) AN ALL-PARTY GOVERNMENT OR A GRAND COALITION /MIGHT BE NECESSARY. HE ALSO DESCRIBED STRAUSS AS THE MOST DANGEROUS SPD PDLITICAL OPPONENT.

3. EMBASSY CONTACTS HAVE DESCRIBED STRAUSS AND WEHNER'S REMARKS AS "TACTICAL". ONE OF THE LEADING MEMBERS OF THE CDU LIBERAL WING DR. VON WEIZSAEGER CHARACTERIZED THE STRAUSS COMMENT AS A PLOY TO CONVINCE THE CDU WHAT AN ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATE HE WOULD BE AND THAT IF THE SPD WERE WILLING TO ACCEPT HIM AS VICE CHANCELLOR AND FOREIGN MINISTER THE CDU COULD DO NO LESS. WEHNER'S MOTIVES ARE AS USUAL MORE DIFFICULT TO FATHOM BUT IT IS LIKELY THAT HE IS USING THE THREAT OF A GRAND COALITION AS A MEANS OF BRINGING THE FDP, WHICH HAS BEEN MAKING DIFFICULTIES CONFIDENTIAL

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IN THE HESSE COALITION NEGOTIATIONS AND HAS BEGUN TO SEEK MORE INDEPENDENCE WITHIN THE BONN COALITION, BACK INTO LINE.

4. COMMENT: COULD FRANZ-JOSEPH STRAUSS AND HELMUT SCHMIDT FIND HAPPINESS IN A GRAND COALITION? AT PRESENT IT APPEARS THAT SUCH SPECULATION IS DESIGNED MORE TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE VARIOUS ACTORS THAN A SERIOUS PROPOSAL TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT. THE CDU HAS TASTED SUCCESS IN BAVARIA AND HESSE AND IS NOW THINKING IN TERMS OF WINNING AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTION. THERE IS THEREFORE NOT MUCH

ENTHUSIASM FOR JOINING UP WITH THE SPD. AT THE SAME
TIME, HOWEVER, A SEVERE ECONOMIC CRISIS COULD CHANGE
THE PICTURE AND UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS A SCHMIDT-STRAUSS
GOVERNMENT IS NOT UNTHINKABLE.
HILLENBRAND

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